

Scrapbook of Comic Book Letters

Written by Bruce Long

Published 1966–1973

In 1965 when I was eighteen, I became a fan of Marvel Comics. For the next seven years I was active in the Marvel subculture, which included writing letters to the editor. Perhaps one-third of the letters I submitted were published.

These published letters are presented here without pretense of literary value. They are simply artifacts of the 1966–1973 comic book subculture from the perspective of one sophomoric fan's published letters, plus a little added commentary from 2022.

Bruce Long

2022

Daredevil #19

August 1966

Dear Stan and John,

D.D. #16 was strictly out of sight—no pun intended! I have nothing personal against Steve Ditko but the most sensational coup which Marvel could perform would be to let Johnny Romita draw Spidey regularly. I have never seen a more vibrant, powerful, or majestic Spider-Man, and never a more realistic Peter Parker. So please, for the pure good of Marveldom, give Spidey to John Romita. No, I am not a relative of John's! There is only one reason in the world why the change should not be made. Because if it is, then F.F. will no longer be "The World's Greatest Comic Magazine," for Spidey will have stolen the title. If you do make the change, I promise that I will challenge Irving Forbush to a game of marbles and then let him win just to boost his ego. So be it! And please don't give me a typical Stan Lee answer like, "If you don't like John Romita, why don't you SAY so? We can't stand people who beat around the bush!"

Bruce Long, [REDACTED]
Whittier, Calif.

Now you did it, Bruce! Stan tells us he won't write any more answers for us from now on! He says if you already know what he's gonna say, why should he waste his time? So, he tore up that piece of paper on which he had started writing: "If you don't like John Romita, why don't—" and he stormed out, without even reminding us to face front! If you see him wandering around outside, tell him to come back, hear? He still hasn't told us who the Marauder is!

The appealing aspects of the Marvel subculture included slang and catchphrases; using such jargon increased the likelihood of a letter being published. My execrable use of "out of sight" was intended, being both hip and cringe (because *Daredevil* was blind). I thought John Romita's smooth artwork on Spider-Man was more enjoyable and accessible than Steve Ditko's scratchy version.

Tales of Suspense #81

September 1966

Dear Stan,

You have finally gone too far. In SUSPENSE #77 the volcano is described as a "long dead volcano". Then in SUSPENSE #78 the volcano is a "long smoldering, long dormant volcano" and smoke is coming out of it. There's quite a difference between the two! And how could Iron Man, never having seen the volcano, know how to make it erupt just like that? Now I'm against Red China as much as the next guy, but what the heck is Iron Man trying to do — start a World War? Imagine what would happen if some Red Chinese nut in a tin suit ran onto one of our air bases, clobbered the guards, stole a jet, and flew it back to China! Would we like it? Darn right we wouldn't. So what you should have done is have Iron Man tame Ultimo, then take him on his back across the ocean, and finally give Ultimo Cap's place in the Avengers. This is no less plausible than your version and at least this way, we don't run the risk of starting a war! Anyway, tell Gene that the art work was excellent.

Bruce Long, [REDACTED]
Whittier, Cal.

We told 'im, we told 'im! Incidentally, most of the bullpen gang figured you were kidding about having Ultimo join the Avengers — but you should see ol' Stan — he's been walking around all afternoon muttering: "Just the idea I've been *looking* for!" So, don't be surprised if you get a no-prize in your next no-mail!

Marvel soon began sending out "no-prize" awards and I received several of them (empty envelopes) during the next few years. The comment about "Cap's place in the Avengers" referred to a then-active discussion as to whether Captain America should be removed from The Avengers because he seemed to function better as a solo hero/glory hog.

The Avengers #34

November 1966

Dear Stan and Don,

There is one romance which, though in the background, has stood out over all the others during the past years. Although the two major powers in the world strove to keep them apart, still their love endured and grew. As Lawrence Durrell has written, "The richest love is that which submits to the arbitration of time." I am speaking, of course, of the love between Hawkeye and Natasha. I know you

will never give the Black Widow membership in the Avengers because her powers are too similar to those of another Marvel character. But, please, before another year goes by, bring Hawkeye and Natasha together for good. I have always felt that Hawkeye's love was just as tragic as Tony Stark's love or Matt Murdock's love, but Hawkeye was far more the man for not engaging in the self-pity that they do. It seems like a long time since Reed and Sue got together—give us something else to rejoice over, huh?

Bruce Long. [REDACTED]

Whittier, Calif.

Well, let's see now, Brucie — you can always rejoice over the fact that we just came back from the dentist, and the ol' Bullpen had thirty per cent fewer cavities than Brand Echh! (There's probably a deep, philosophical lesson hidden in there somewhere!) As for the Black Widow and her bombastic boy-friend, we are, alas, unable to chart the course of true love—but things usually turn out for the best in Marvel-land, so have faith, frantic one—we may meetcha at the wedding yet!

I urged giving Hawkeye and the Black Widow more snuggle time, with a confidently inaccurate prediction that Natasha would never become an Avenger. I had recently read the novels in Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet*, and this was probably the first (and only?) Durrell quote in a comic book letter column. This editor's comment was the first response in which Marvel called me "Brucie", to which I had decidedly mixed feelings.

Strange Tales #154

March 1967

Dear Stan,

Allow me to be the first to congratulate you on your most recent Marvel masterpiece, *STRANGE TALES* #150. With the introduction of Umar, the unrelenting sister of Dormammu, you have opened up all sorts of outstanding original avenues of plot development. Before long we could have the Son of Dormammu, the great-great-uncle of Dormammu, the third cousin of Dormammu, and the mother-in-law of Dormammu. And who knows, if this keeps up, we may even see the story which would promise to be the classic of the century—the Hound of the Dormammus! (Or, who *says* this isn't the Marvel age of sarcastic fan letters?!)

Bruce Long, [REDACTED]
Whittier, Calif. 90606

Jeepers, Brucie boy—if you hadn't added that last sentence we'd never have known you were being sarcastic! We were too busy jotting down all your suggestions and thinking how great they were! In fact, Marie's already done a costume design for Dormammu's mother-in-law! But, tell us one thing, faithful one—how'd you find out about the Hound of the Dormammus? We were keeping him under wraps to surprise Marveldom with later on! Now you've spoiled everything! But, we're still one jump ahead of you—you haven't mentioned anything about Dormammu's Uncle Sidney, on his father's side! Just wait'll you meet *him*! (Who says this isn't the Marvel Age of "If you can't lick 'em, join 'em"?!)

One of my favorite letters, dripping with overstated sarcasm and attempted humor. But, "Brucie boy"? Glad I wasn't called that all my life. I always mentally pronounced the villain's name Dor'-ma-mmu [accent on the first syllable], and didn't like it when the 2016 Doctor Strange movie pronounced it Dor-mam'-mu [accent on the second syllable].

Amazing Spider-Man #49

June 1967

Dear Stan and John,

Since PLAYBOY recently presented an excellent satire of Captain America, and mentioned the Human Torch and the Sub-Mariner in the process, I think it is only fair that you show your appreciation by publishing a center-fold illo of gorgeous Gwen or Mary Jane Watson. (Okay, okay, I know you would drive the human race wild if you did, but I can dream, can't I?)

PFC Bruce Long, [REDACTED]
Ft. Leonard Wood, Mo. 64573

Gee, Bruce, we're sorry to report that we don't have a single fold-out pic of Gwen or MJ anywhere in the Bullpen. But, tell you what—do you think our frantic ones would enjoy a photo of Jolly Jonah as a baby? We bet he'd cause a real sensation on a bear rug, sucking his thumb, with a little ribbon in his hair! (-Especially if we added that nutty moustache of his, just for kicks!)

By this time I was in the United States Army, but fortunately the PX facilities carried most of the Marvel line so I was able to keep up with current comic book releases. Harvey Kurtzman had recently presented a parody of Captain America in his "Little Annie Fannie" comic feature in *Playboy*, which prompted this letter. I honestly didn't think they would publish it because of the subject matter. Marvel edited my original letter, which made no mention of Gwen, and my last sentence was: "(Okay, okay, I know you would lose your Comics Code Seal of Approval if you did, but I can dream, can't I?)"

Bullpen Page

September 1967

ITEM! Well, looky here! Another letter which you may be interested in—
Dear Stan: You are making a drastic mistake. Not being content to produce the best-written and best-drawn comics in America, you're allowing Marvel to turn into a fad—due to the tons of merchandise bearing your characters which is on sale all over. If this isn't stopped, Marvel may suffer the fate of all other fads—it may rise in a burst of glory and then fade out until, months from now, Marvel is naught but a memory. Your mags are great enough to stand on their own merit without all the other stuff. Please! I was here when The Marvel Age of Comics began, but I don't want to be here when it ends!—PFC Bruce Long, [redacted] Ft. Leonard Wood, Missouri.
Bruce, buddy—we really appreciate your concern, but we have a feeling the end isn't quite in sight yet. One thing you must have noticed—no matter what novelties and nick-nacks are produced bearing the Marvel imprint—and we think they're all kinda swell—it doesn't in any way affect the stories or artwork in our award-winning mags. For the Merry Ones who enjoy model kits of our characters—or records—or games—or sweatshirts—or coloring books—or almost anything you can name, we've got 'em in abundance. But, for those who are interested solely in the Marvel mags themselves, we're working as hard as ever—and as enthusiastically as ever—to produce the best darned illustrated epics the world has ever seen! Isn't that really all that counts? So long as we can continue turning out the type of thrillers our rollick-in' readers enjoy, there's no reason for anyone to become a Marvel dropout! And, the day we start to slip—the day we start giving you less than our best, then we deserve whatever happens! Fair enough?

A major goal for letter writers at that time was to have a letter published on the "Bullpen Page", which was the hub for Marvel announcements, included in every Marvel superhero comic for that month. Fans can be unrealistically possessive about all aspects of the fandom object. I thought Marvel's merchandising, which was small potatoes compared to merchandising now, was ultimately diluting and degrading the Marvel brand. I was wrong yet again, and it's nice that Marvel has expanded so successfully into other forms of entertainment.

Fantastic Four #73

April 1968

Dear Stan and Jack,

Recall that in F.F. #25 Reed whipped up a potion — a double-your-money-back guarantee to turn Thing back to Benjy. What happened? Thing refused to drink and clobbered the beaker of change-juice. His logic — Alicia loves him totally as he is with any change possibly altering her love which is a reasonably valid point. So now why all the weeping and wailing for a return to normalcy? He had his chance and blew it. Self pity is definitely not where it's at. Dry his eyes. They've been getting so wet, you can't tell they're blue.

SP4 Bruce Long, [REDACTED]

3d Inf. Div. (PM)

APO, New York, N. Y. 09036

Either that or he's sneaked out and been fitted with tinted *contact lenses*! Anyway, you have to admit the guy's got something to be hung up about! Who *wouldn't* feel sorry for himself if he looked like an overgrown, petrified orange? And, finally, if you still think his eyes need drying, why don't you tell him about it *in person* — unless maybe you also think he has a bad temper!

I finally had a letter accepted into Marvel's flagship *Fantastic Four* comic book. My writing style here was decidedly weird, a "look at me!" attempt to catch the page editor's attention. I thought using my military address made it more likely for letters to be published, because it demonstrated that soldiers and not just kids were reading their comics. The phrase "return to normalcy" stuck in my head after I had encountered it in a high school history class, and "where it's at" had recently become a common slang term.

Captain Savage #19

March 1970

Dear Stan, Gary, and Dick,

After reading Mr. Shaffer's letter in CAPTAIN SAVAGE #17, I feel compelled to throw in my 2¢ worth.

Mr. Shaffer seems to know his propaganda pretty well, but is not too sharp on his history. The reason why the United States entered World War Two was not "to halt the mad plans of Hitler, to prevent his tyranny from engulfing the world, to avenge the death of one hundred million people, to save millions more from the clutches of death, and to stop the madman whose great joy was inhuman torture." There is only one reason why the United States entered the war—BECAUSE WAR WAS DECLARED ON THE UNITED STATES! Up to that time, the United States had practiced the strictest isolationism and neutrality imaginable.

Present-day historians generally agree that Hitler made one fatal mistake—he chose to prematurely declare war on the two world powers who wanted no part of the war whatsoever—Russia and the United States. In so doing, Hitler spread the German war effort too thin, created too many fronts. If he had left Russia and the United States alone, he could have eventually conquered England. Then, after a period of rebuilding with almost all of Western Europe under the Swastika, he could have moved against Russia. Only after Russia was defeated should Hitler have considered declaring war on America from a military stand-point. If he had not been so impatient, the flag of the Third Reich might be flying over America today.

Of course, it is indeed fortunate for the world that Hitler failed.

But from a historical viewpoint his failure is to be credited to his own mistakes, and not to the righteous actions of the United States of America, as Mr. Shaffer seems to feel.

Bruce Long, [redacted]
Whittier, California 90606

O.K., Bruce. Your comments are hereby registered for perusal by the Marvel Multitudes.

We must admit, tho, that we can't fully go along with those sweeping generalizations about why Hitler lost or why the United States entered the war.

One thing we've learned over the years is that, more often than not, it is very hard to prove that one and only one reason determines why something happened. We're just not so sure as you seem to be that, had Hitler made no mistakes, we'd now be Sieg Heil'in; each other instead of saying "Hi!"

I wish this letter had never been written or published. Having been annoyed by someone else's published letter, I arrogantly overstated my response, distorting America's neutrality far beyond historical truth.

Amazing Spider-Man #84

May 1970

Dear Stan and John,

Since Richard Parker (Peter's father) was killed while on active duty working for the U.S. Government (and even if this information was withheld from the general public, the highest echelon of U.S. Intelligence had to know about it,) Peter Parker is DRAFT EXEMPT because he is a sole surviving son.

Skeptics may see SPIDEY ANNUAL #5.

Bruce Long, [REDACTED]

Montebello, Cal. 90640

Interesting point you've brought up there, Bruce lad. To tell the truth, though, we're not sure that "highest echelon" which you mention as knowing about Richard Parker's fatal mission necessarily included Petey's ever-lovin' draft board! And, dodging the whole issue in our customary cowardly way— is there anybody out there (mayhap a spokesman for U.S. Intelligence?) who can give us the inside scoop? Fact is, we're so eager for info on this point that we'll probably end up taking the word of anybody this side of the Red-Skull! So don't let us down, hear?

There had been ongoing discussion regarding Peter Parker's draft status. Since nobody had mentioned the Sole Survivor policy, I thought I'd bring it up, even though I was no expert on the subject.

Iron Man #30

November 1970

Dear Stan, Archie and Don,

In the past you have ever verbally adhered to the claim that you never used misleading covers — all your covers were scenes taken from the story itself, either literally, or with a small portion of artistic license. But by the Freaky Freckles of Irving Forbush, what did the cover of IRON MAN #27 have to do with the story inside (aside from the presence of Chrome-Dome and whats-his-name)??? Not a bloody thing!!! Masochistic Marvel has finally done it — they have presented a really phoney cover! And, they had to do it on the most timely (ring a bell?), sophisticated, and socially relevant story to see print.

Plus, I have figured out the identity of whats-his-name, uh Firebrand. (Are you ready for this, now?) Firebrand is Liz Allen! Evidence: She is really the only character we have thus met within the "Marvel Universe" whose age fits in with this perfectly. After seeing her in nearly every issue of SPIDER-MAN for several years, she suddenly disappears from the scene right after graduation from high school (in the same class with Peter Parker), muttering something to the effect that the childish, immature phase of her life was over, and she was going to have a fresh, different, and stronger start. She has not been seen in years. Time enough to harden the heart. The size of the costume could be explainable as being similar to the one Titanium Man used to waltz around in—far larger than the wearer, but easily controllable from inside. The statement about being an "All-American Boy" was made to divert any suspicions Iron Man might have, while still telling her true story. The voice could be filtered through a filtering device (what else would it be filtered through?) to come out deeper than it is.

This could also result in a very interesting SPIDER-MAN crossover, nicht wahr?

I shall await my no-prize by return Jabberwock (which will be much cheaper than mail, after the postal increase).

If I get 15 no-prizes, can I trade them in for a F.F.F. and an autograph of Artie Simek?

P.M.M. Bruce A. Long, [REDACTED]

Montebello, Ca. 90640

You can only get the autograph, Bruce, and then only if you include seven slithy toves! As for your fearsome and forthright theory of Firebrand — we won't say anything without hearing some comments from the rest of our Ferro-philes. You know how we like to clutch whatever we can manage to keep secret!

They cut the end of my first paragraph which I wrote as "...to see print under the Comics Code since National's *Green Lantern* #76." Marvel never granted publicity to their competitors. Profanity was forbidden but I got away with using "bloody", and was surprised that "masochistic" survived. I loved my use of "waltz around in". This is the only letter I signed with my P.M.M. (Permanent Marvelite Maximus) fandom title.

Amazing Spider-Man #84

November 1970

Dear Stan, John, and Jim,

When I opened the pages of SPIDER-MAN #86 I expected to find the Black Widow, not Mary Jane Watson in a wet-suit. SHEEESH!!!

Bruce A. Long, [REDACTED]
Montebello, Calif. 90640

So what's wrong with M.J. in a wet-suit? We have it on the best authority from Jazzy Johnny Romita himself that the marvy Miss Watson looks groovy in the latest skin-diving equipment—even though the snorkel does rather hide the face that launched a thousand spiders!

"Sheesh!" was used in Marvel jargon as faux-profanity, with additional letters and exclamation points increasing the strength of the swear. So my "SHEEESH!!!" was pretty faux-strong. When the Black Widow's hair color was changed to red and her web-themed costume was replaced with a black full bodysuit, I didn't like it. The point I was trying to make was that Natasha's long red hair was too similar to Mary Jane Watson's, and the former fancy and distinctive Black Widow costume now looked like a plain wetsuit. I wasn't trying to disparage MJ in the slightest, but the column editor seemed to think otherwise. Sheesh!

Amazing Spider-Man #95

April 1971

Dear Stan, Gil, and Johnny,

The cover title of SPIDER-MAN #90 ("SPIDER-MAN — THE KILLER!") is the sort of title you have been using quite often lately, and it usually doesn't hold true. This time it does. Any 2nd grader knows that when a person has been injured in the manner that Capt. Stacy was, the first rule of first-aid is: DON'T MOVE THE VICTIM. If there was a doctor in the next building, the logical thing for Spidey to have done was to go get him and rush him to the scene, not pick Stacy up and walk up the side of a wall with him. Even if he would have died anyway (of internal injuries, probably), Spider-Man's actions undoubtedly shortened the Captain's life by minutes, if not hours or days.

Although Peter Parker was only indirectly responsible for the death of his Uncle Ben, he is directly responsible for the death of George Stacy. This fact should haunt him with the strongest sense of guilt possible, for the rest of his life. If he were tried in a court of law, he would even possibly be found guilty of involuntary manslaughter, depending on the coroner's report.

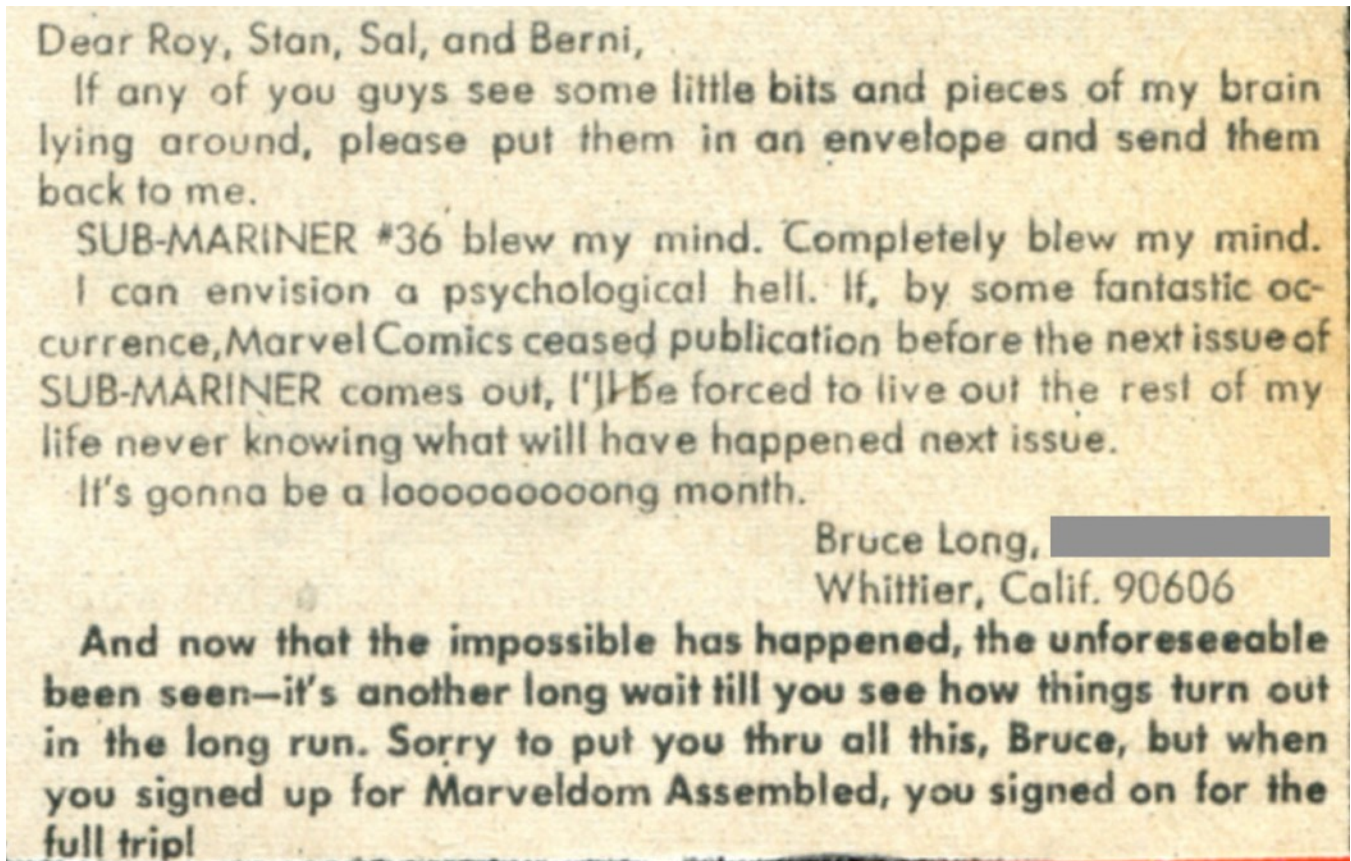
Bruce Long, [REDACTED]
Hontebello, Calif. 90640

And perhaps it is this knowledge, as well as the fact that he inadvertently placed Captain Stacy's life in danger, which haunts Peter Parker even now. Though, where it will lead — what devious paths this all-consuming guilt will take — no one, not even Stan and his overworked artistic crew, can possibly know.

It was much easier for me to write a letter of criticism rather than praise, though letters of praise were more likely to be accepted for publication. Here I didn't hesitate to pseudo-authoritatively make pronouncements on medicine and the legal system. But I still think Spidey had acted foolishly.

Sub-Mariner #40

August 1971



"Blew my mind", man. I loved sneaking contemporary slang into my letters. I added the opening sentence to indicate the expression as used here was *not* a sexual metaphor. I was reacting to a cliffhanger story ending which I found to be unexpected and shocking. Probably the "blew my mind" expression historically originated as an occasional variant of "blew my top", signifying sudden extreme anger as visually expressed in 1940s cartoons, when an angry character's head would erupt like a volcano. In the 60s it became used as common hippie term to signify extreme astonishment; that's absolutely how I meant for the expression to be understood in the letter.

Around this time I completed my collection of Silver Age Marvel Comics. Instead of the fulfillment and satisfaction I had anticipated, I felt a hollowness. The striving itself had been far more satisfying than reaching the goal. So I began reading and collecting a wider variety of comic books, while still keeping my Marvel collection up to date.

Sgt. Fury #91

September 1971

Dear Stan:

It's bad enough when mistakes are made within a story itself, but when you have someone writing an answer to a letter stating that Percy dates back to SGT. FURY #1, you go way too far. (In SGT. FURY #86)

Therefore: It being evident that you are in need of someone to answer letters pages, I would like to apply for the job. (For one or as many mags as you wish.)

Over the past several years, I have had about a dozen letters printed in your mags, including one on the bullpen page itself, so I feel certain I can express myself in a manner suitable to the Marvel letters pages.

I have a complete set (since F.F. #1) of Marvel superhero, war, and western comics, which I am constantly re-reading.

I have compiled an index of every single Marvel hero, villain, and supporting character appearing in your superhero stories.

Being a typically rabid fan, I would be glad to answer letters for free, which I could easily do in my spare time (I am employed as a clerk-typist).

True, I don't really expect you to go for this, but a fellow has to try, doesn't he?

Until the Marvelennium,

Bruce A. Long, [redacted]

Whittier, Calif. 90606

I guess, if a fellow has to be trying, Bruce—he might as well be it around fellow Marvellites. You're quite correct in stating that Pvt. Pinkerton was not aboard in SGT FURY #1; he made his dashing debut somewhere between SGT. FURY #7 and SGT. FURY #10. We'll check the exact issue for you as soon as our research department comes back from her coffee break. In defense of the staff member responsible for the misinformation, he had just given up smoking (several times that day) and was suffering withdrawal symptoms at the time of the writing.

Howsomever, as it was you who brought the inadequacies of this "Percy person" to our attention, his life is yours—to do with as you wish. We can unceremoniously drum him out of the ranks of Marveldom Assembled, have him court-martialed, shot at dawn . . . or merely flogged with a damp copy of SPOOF #1. Looking forward to your decision . . .

This was nitpicking plus arrogant boasting and daydreaming. As a rabid fan, the ultimate fantasy job would have been to work for Marvel Comics, but I couldn't draw or write comics, and I sure didn't want to live in New York. My loose-leaf index had a separate page for each Marvel character, and listed each appearance.

Justice League of America #92

September 1971

Dear Editor:

There's one thing you have to hand *JL.A* #89: it was ORIGINAL. I don't recall ever reading any serious comix magazine story that treated itself as exactly that—a comix magazine story.

WOW.

It wasn't until the second time I read it through that I got it. But what if all the readers *got it*, and realized that a personal involvement with a character in a dream is far superior to merely observing fictional situations involving that character. Why, no one would ever read a comix magazine again. And *then* where would you be???

—BRUCE LONG, Whittier, Ca.

(Never mind US; where would YOU be in this comix-less world?—JS)

This was my first letter published in a National (DC) comic. I had been impressed with the way a story had acknowledged its own reality as a comic book story. But I did not like the way National starting referring to all comics as "comix", even changing the spelling within my letter. I thought the spelling "comix" should be reserved for underground comics, since the undergrounds had using the term first. The editorial response to my letter was written by Julius Schwartz.

Daredevil #81

November 1971

Dear Stan, Gerry, Gene, and Tom,

Marvel Comics have come a tremendous distance in the past ten years. The quality of the stories, the level of the stories, and the quality of the artwork have been on the upswing constantly. But there is one area that has not improved in the least, and that is the area of your so-called "boo-boos." A fine example is page six of DD #77. I find it incredible to believe that Mr. Palmer did not know Mary Jane Watson's hair is red. It appears he might try reading a few of your other mags.

It may seem like just a small thing to you. And true, to the casual reader, it may make no difference whatsoever. But to the hundred thousand or so hard-core Marvel readers, it was very annoying. And frankly, in view of the professionalism which surrounds the other aspects of Marvel Comics, I think it is inexcusable.

Bruce Long, [REDACTED]
Whittier, California 90606

See our first answer, Bruce. (Frankly, a little thing like hair-dye does seem to catch on. Next thing we know, somebody'll point out this issue's fantastic blooper, when our madcap colorist painted the entire left side of Daredevil's right elbow a solid green. Oops! Now you'll know what to look for—!)

Mary Jane Watson's hair was incorrectly colored, unleashing my ire. My letter had stated, "...But to the thousand or so hard-core Marvel readers...", and the page editor multiplied the number by 100 to promote their brand.

Thor #193

November 1971

Dear Bullpen:

I have been coming to the conclusion that Stan never reads his own stories, once they are written. And due to the volume of stories he writes, he all too often forgets (or gets mixed up) what he had previously written. Two examples of this are: (1) In *Thor* #134, Ego was destroyed by Galactus. Many issues later they battled for the "first" time, and Ego, aided by Thor, was victorious. (2) "Sub-Space" was the other dimensional area that the FF sometimes ventured into, with an entrance in FF headquarters. "Negative Zone" was the barrier which imprisoned the Inhumans. Somewhere along the line, you began calling "Sub-Space" the "Negative Zone," and that's what you have been calling it ever since.

Now in *SAVAGE TALES* #1, we have another example. Ka-Zar's substance capable of dissolving metal was called Plunderstone or Anti-Metal; and Vibranium was the name of The Black Panther's ore capable of absorbing vibrations and sound. Now you suddenly tell us that Vibranium is the name of Ka-Zar's substance.

My main regret about Marvel is that, although each individual story is generally consistent with itself, the whole Marvel saga is riddled with such inconsistencies. And I wish that all the Marvel stories would have fitted together to form a perfectly coherent epic.

Bruce Long, [REDACTED]
Whittier, Calif., 90606

Well, Bruce, there're many explanations for the phenomena you mentioned, some of them too elaborate to go into here. The simplest is, paradoxically, the least informative: "Dominito Bene Leggo Sum." See what we mean?

This complaint about continuity errors was originally sent to *Savage Tales*, but that comic went on hiatus after the first issue and the letter surfaced on the *Thor* letters page.

Forever People #6

January 1972

Dear Jack,

To be frank, I was not overly thrilled by *Forever People* #1, #2, and #3. They were good comics, but it's hard to get worked up over comic characters you don't know—and there has been virtually no background given thus far. But I was intrigued, fascinated, and enthralled by the Mother Box.

Then came *Forever People* #4. When I came to page 10, I actually cried out in anguish! "NO!!!!" Let Desaad torture and kill off every superhero in National's and Marvel's stables, if he must—BUT NOT MOTHER BOX! Not Mother Box. Please.

As it happened, she survived

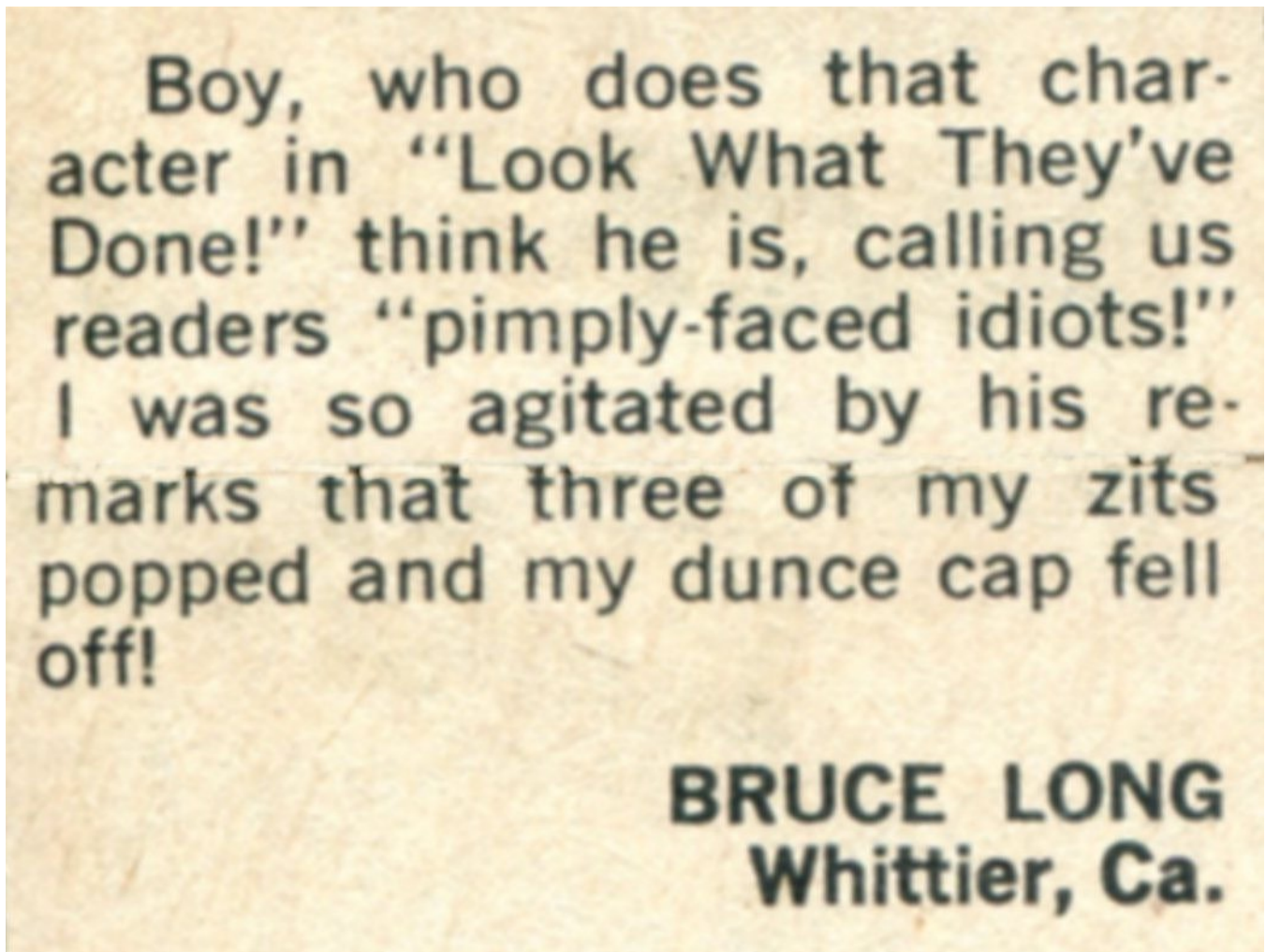
But *I* almost didn't!!

Bruce Long, Whittier, Calif.

I thought Mother Box was a very good comic character in concept and execution, which prompted my extreme reaction to her full-page distress. Since this was published by National, it was nice that they didn't edit out my mention of Marvel, which I assume was because the comic was edited by Jack Kirby. Did I really need to theorize such a grisly superhero bloodbath?

Eerie #38

February 1972



A story in the Warren comic *Eerie* totally broke the fourth wall and the hero addressed the readers as "pimple-faced idiots", inspiring this silly response from me.

Sinister House of Secret Love #4

May 1972

Dear Editor:

National's two Gothic Novel books rank equally alongside Jack Kirby's "Fourth World" books as the most promising and original comics to unfold during 1971.

SINISTER HOUSE OF SECRET LOVE #2 has been the best of the Gothics thus far, particularly in the scripting department. For too long in the comics, deep characterization has been practically impossible due to the formulas the different types of comics were forced to adhere to. Super-hero comics are always filled with cover-to-cover action, and the supernatural comics are always totally dominated by the supernatural. This, when coupled with the page limitations, inevitably leave us with only stereotyped characters (of course, there have been exceptions—but not many). Not a single character in SINISTER #2 was stereotyped: All were rounded individuals, revealing within the story many sides, many moods, many aspects. A comic based on *drama*, not action (and because of this, whatever action there was was intensified tremendously). True, it was a little sugary, But I realize that it would be too risky (financially) if you were to abandon *all* formulas.

Tony's artwork was, as usual, superb.

I do not consider SINISTER #2 to have been a great comic. But it *was* a good comic, which whispered of exciting and better things to come within this new format. I can only hope that sales are good enough to warrant continued experimentation in this vein.

Bruce Long
Whittier, Calif.

Thanks for the kind words, Bruce. We hope subsequent issues have lived up to your expectations.

I had to applaud National's experiments outside the established comic book genres, but unfortunately the gothic horror experiment did not generate enough sales to survive. A few issues later the same letter was edited and reprinted, presumably because the comic title was not generating enough new letters to fill the letters page.

House of Mystery #203

June 1972

Dear Cain;

The splash page to "Sno Fun" was one of the most delightful pieces of comic art I've seen in a long time. But as for the story itself . . . let's see if I get this straight. The story starts out as a flashback. We immediately have another flashback, this one within a flashback. And then we instantly have another flashback, this one within the second flashback (which is within the first flashback). A flashback within a flashback within a flashback.

Sei vorsichtig! 'Twas recently demonstrated in the National Lampoon how easily one can be flash-backed to death.

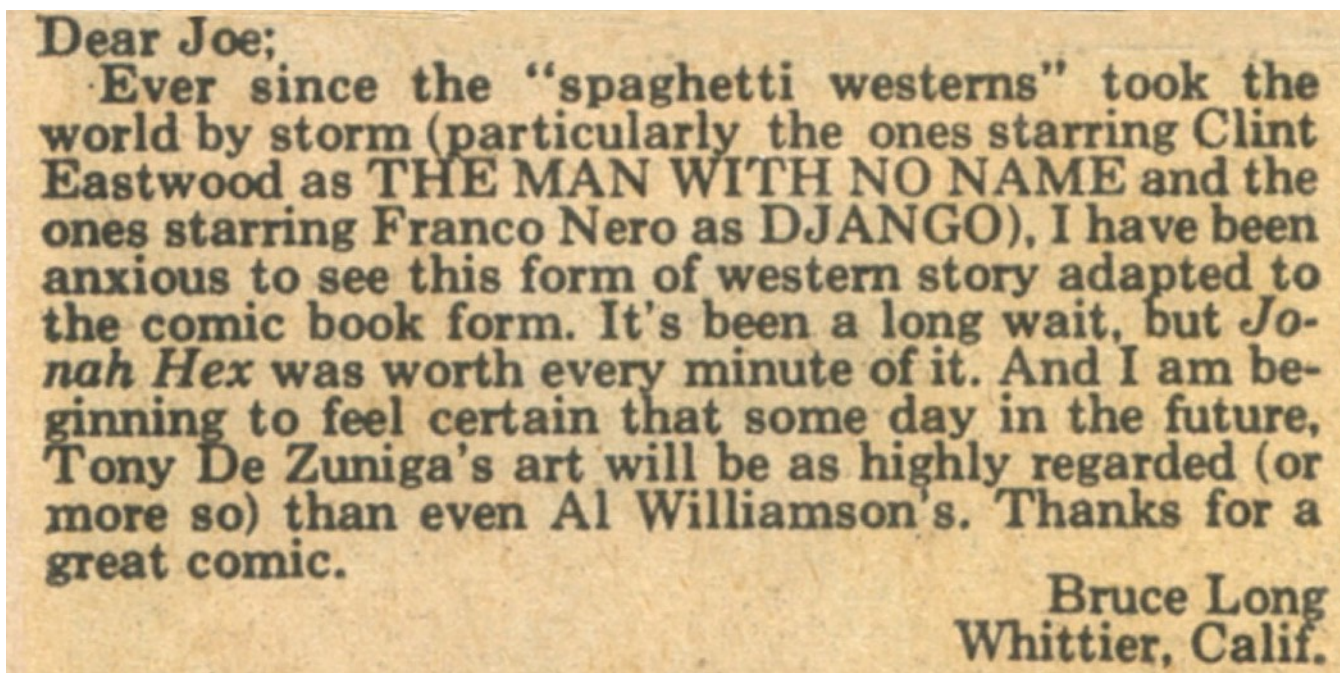
Bruce Long
Whittier, Calif.

**FIRST WOOD WOOD WOOD, AND NOW FLASH-
BACK FLASHBACK FLASHBACK. I'M GET-
TING SICK SICK SICK.**

Why did I think that particular splash page was so "delightful"? I have no idea. Perhaps my critical senses have dulled over the past 50 years.

Weird Western Tales #12

July 1972



I was among the earliest American fans of *Django*, the movie starring Franco Nero. While stationed in Germany from 1967-1969 I saw many Spaghetti Westerns; a local art house theater in Würzburg even held film festivals of them, labeling the genre "Sado-Western." I was highly impressed with specific scenes and the overall atmosphere in *Django*, which enabled me to compartmentalize the film's unpleasant aspects. At the time I wrote this letter, *Django* had not yet received a general theatrical release in America. So I was pleased to get this letter published with my praise of the film, throwing a tiny spotlight on it.

Wonder Woman #221

August 1972

Dear Editor,

When I got off work I was pooped out. But there was a lot of stuff I had to do. Go to the bank. Stop at the supermarket. Get gas. Check for new comics. Pick up a couple of hamburgers.

Hamburgers digesting, I flip through the hastily bought comics and pull out Wonder Woman. I notice the style of the cover and the signature. **Jeff Jones, doing a D.C. comic book cover?** Then I look at the cover itself and am instantly transfixed . . .

. . . **"My God, what a cover!"** . . .

. . . Fifteen minutes later, I make it to this typewriter. The comic is still unopened.

Alan Chasin
Los Angeles, Calif.

Alan's reaction to Jeff's superb rendering is . . . typical.

"Pooped out" (giggle, giggle). I still think that particular comic cover is impressive, because normal superhero comic covers were brimming with action or emotion, and this cover was something else entirely. Sometimes I signed a pseudonym "Alan Chasin." Usually it was either because I had already sent a letter and later thought of another comment to make, knowing that they wouldn't print two letters from the same writer. Or else I simply wanted to stay anonymous because of the letter's contents. No one in a normal state of mind would space out staring at a comic cover for 15 minutes.

Sub-Mariner #53

September 1972

Dear Stan and the rest:

A while back I bought a copy of golden-age SUB-MARINER #6 (Summer of '42) and I just happened to re-read it. The most striking thing about it is the exclamations Namor uses. Within this one issue he comes up with:

"Sufferin' Sea Bass!"
"Gallop'ing Guppies!"
"Hoppin' Herrings!"
"Sizzlin' Sardines!"
"Cacklin' Catfish!"
"Pickled Pike!"
"Cock-Eyed Codfish!"
"Hot Haddock!"
"Dancin' Dogfish!"
"Cluckin' Clams!"
"Holy Halibut!"
"Flyin' Flounder!"
"Shiverin' Shad!"
"Shuttlin' Sharks!"
"Jumpin' Jellyfish!"
"Peppered Perch!"
"Rompin' Roe!" (and a few others)

Just for kicks, why not do a story where Namor develops partial amnesia and forgets everything that's happened since the 1940's (having him talk like that once more).

It would be far out.

Bruce Long. [REDACTED]
Whittier, Calif. 90606

Indeed it would, Bruce — very. But Juan Cole (elsewhere on this page) is a little uneasy about Namor's bouts with amnesia, so we probably won't try that again. Which is not to say that Subby couldn't head the way you suggest, since the man who produced that nostalgic nifty of thirty years ago is the man who's producing the contemporary classics (this alliteration is getting truly bizarre, folks) you're now reading. And who's to gainsay Mr. Everett his right to do whatever he wants with his creation? Certainly not ye olde Bullpen.

"Far out", man. The previous year, "Summer of '42" had been a big movie hit, so I liked the way I was able to use the phrase when discussing a Marvel comic.

Captain America #156

December 1972

Dear Bullpen:

In the letters page of CAPTAIN AMERICA #152 you asked for the readers' opinions as to whether the covers should use literal scenes or phoney ones, promising to try to print the results of this poll. I am definitely against any phony covers whatsoever. The cover of a comic book is like a movie trailer, and I feel cheated if a scene in the preview was not in the actual story. It is to Marvel's credit that you have not used anywhere near the percentage of phoney covers that your major competitor has. I hope you will do away with them altogether.

Alan Chasin
Los Angeles, California

p.s. I noticed Cap in the recent editorial cartoon by Stayskal.

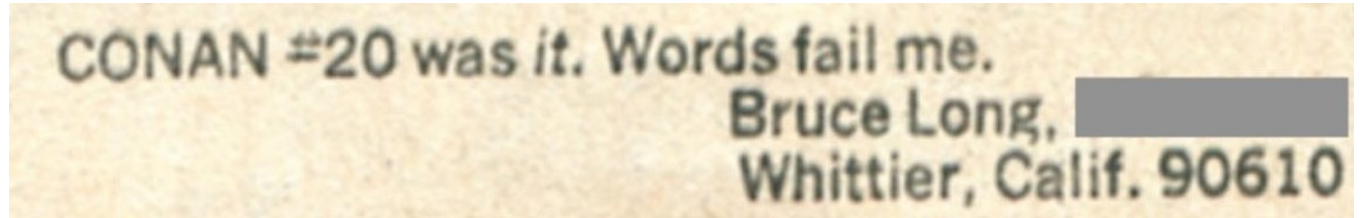
Well, sometimes we get caught with our deadlines down, as happened with CA&F #152, but we try not to let it happen, and we're certainly not striving for misrepresentation. So we'll keep right on truckin' the way we have been, giving you the best we can offer. Fair 'nuff?

P.S. We didn't notice that cartoon, Alan. Could you send us a copy at this late date?

I couldn't decide how I wanted to spell phony/phoney. Neither way looks right, even now. The reference to Stayskal was the first time I had seen a Marvel character in an editorial cartoon; that specific cartoon referred to the Easter Offensive during the Vietnam War. It would be nice if there were a collection of old editorial cartoons with famous superhero cameos, but it would be very difficult for researchers to find them.

Conan the Barbarian #26

May 1973



I thought *Conan* #20 was the pinnacle of comic book storytelling. This was my final published comic book letter.

Later in 1973 my comic book hobby/obsession peaked and began to implode, for a variety of reasons. I stopped buying regular monthly issues and soon began disposing of my collection as I shifted to other interests and backed away from comics fandom.